THE TIMES

timesofmalta.com
Wednesday, July 19, 2006

Development boundaries

MPs urged to stand up and be counted

Herman Grech

The area known as Tal-Papa, in Birzebbuga, is among the areas earmarked for development. The three-and-half tumoli land also includes five war shelters. Photos: Matthew Mirabelli

NGOs will be making a last ditch attempt today to try and persuade the government to ditch the development "rationalisation" process as Parliament tonight deliberates one of the most controversial proposals in years.

The plan has incensed so many that an estimated 5,000 individuals with Nationalist sympathies suggested they were prepared to withhold their vote in the coming election if it is given the green light, Lino Bugeja, speaking on behalf of the environment coalition, told The Times.

But sources close to the government said the vote in Parliament is expected to sail through with no abstentions or votes against from the Nationalist ranks.

While the pro-environment lobby is vociferous in its objection to the change in the development boundaries, hundreds of individuals have been piling pressure on the government behind the scenes to legally sanction their plots.

The proposal will go ahead as planned, though a few areas earmarked for development might be excluded, the sources said.

The environment coalition took out a full-page advert in newspapers yesterday to advertise a national protest at City Gate, in Valletta, this afternoon against the proposal.

"Malta has enough building stock within the present development zones to meet requirements for another 20 years but this week Parliament intends to pass a resolution to permit more building in the countryside," the advert read. The government's unusual urgency to rush the rationalisation process is manifestly meant to pre-empt EU strictures in favour of the environment, which come into force on July 21, Mr Bugeja said.

In view of the fact that all efforts had failed, including the legal aspect, whereby an application for the issue of a prohibitory injunction against the Malta Environment and Planning Authority over the planned development zone extension was rejected by the courts, the next step would be to turn to the EU to intervene at this momentous juncture in history, Mr Bugeja said.

Members of the coalition yesterday held a meeting with President Eddie Fenech Adami in the morning and in the evening presented flyers to MPs outside Parliament inviting them to take part in this afternoon's protest.

During the meeting with the President, the NGOs argued that the manner in which the rationalisation of the development zones was handled was ultra vires as it violated the Development Planning Act.

They also raised the point that while they agree with rectifying past injustices and irregularities, this does not justify the building over of large tracts of what little is left of our countryside.

"So many people, so many organisations have objected to the plans. Why is the government ignoring such a national movement," Mr Bugeja asked.

Malta has enough building stock to last 20 years, and further property construction will serve no purpose and

contrary to claims, will still not bring prices down.

"We're telling parliamentarians to stand up and be counted," he added.

Astrid Vella, from Flimkien Ghal Ambjent Ahjar, spoke of some of the "illogical" proposals, especially around Marsaxlokk and Luqa where a big plot of land surrounded by fields has been proposed for development.

"We have the silent support of the majority in this cause, far beyond the numbers who will turn up to the protest," Ms Vella said.

Print article | **Back to article**